



The bridge across the Great Dshirgalan

I had to spend last night again without my baggage. As I was obliged to ride down to the bridge over the Little Dshirgalan to resume making my road-map, I let the caravan go direct over the hills dividing the two rivers of the same name. It was to go down the Great Dshirgalan and meet me in the evening, while I worked in the opposite direction. Owing to a misunderstanding, however, it stopped after crossing the hills, and when darkness overtook me after I had been riding for almost 13 hours, I was still about a dozen miles from the tents and had to avail myself of the hospitality of the Kirghiz. You never require to appeal to them, but merely to accept their proffered hospitality. The women come out and offer you cups brimful of «airan», a kind of very sour milk, pleasant to the taste. It is not exactly appetising, when the old women rub the rim of the cup with their dirty fingers or lick it clean, but in Rome you do as the Romans do. If you enter a yurt, rugs, carpets, covers and pillows are spread out at once in a place of honour and you are given tea and in richer yurts very small, square loaves, baked in sheep's fat. The Kirghiz drink tea with boiled cream and milk, into which they often put salt. They use no sugar. Soon an unwilling sheep is pushed into the yurt and the host announces that it is to be slaughtered in the guest's honour. The boiled mutton is eaten greedily by all the occupants of the yurt, including any guests who may be present, from a common dish and is washed down with a little broth or gravy. The host expects a gift from the guest equivalent to the value of the sheep, even though the stranger may not have touched the dish. Sometimes the poor animal is slaughtered inside the yurt in the presence of the guest. When the sheep has been bound and the butcher is ready to strike with his small knife, everyone stretches out his hands, palms upward as if in prayer, and at a signal from the host and after everyone has stroked his beard with both hands — whether he has one or not — the ceremony

*June 10th.
Camp at
Aq Bulaq.*